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MUSHROOMS

ALFRED KREYMBORG

First Edition

MUSHROOMS

A BOOK OF FREE FORMS

ALFRED KREYMBORG

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TO

ALANSON HARTPENCE

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MUSHROOMS
A BOOK OF FREE FORMS

MUSHROOMS

Mushrooms spring up over night, I'm told — the truth or reason let botanists prove. This much I know, this I can tell: when I go into the forest I love, I can find them everywhere. One of an exquisite hue of blue, another of a passionately clamorous of red; one of an elfish daintiness of form, and that distorted dream of Lear's. I can find each one, I can find them all, and still, I do not, dare not, pluck them. The forest, so rich, so lavish, such a king, wouldn't growl though I pluck all day. But I do not, will not — they would die, I know.

Mushrooms spring up over night in my heart — the reason let philosophers guess. This much I know, this I can tell: myriads and myriads have I found down there, but only a handful have I plucked so far. I plucked them, yes, the few I could, lest they'd die with those I couldn't reach. One was a mood of pale, frail form; another a whimsical sprite; one was some black-browed child of Lear's —

I carry them up to my hothouse attic, up to my gardener for cultivation.

FUGUE

Philosophy?
Oh yes!
To live,
loving,
creating.
Faith?
Oh yes!
A belief in you,
and you and you,
in spite of your you
and your you for you.
Labor?
Oh yes!
That my me and you
may become or grow
toward a you and me.
Guerdon?
Ah yes!
Your belief in me,
and my me for you,
in spite of my me
and my me for me.
Heaven?
Yes!
To die,
created,
living.

SONGS

Who was Orpheus?
A singer, lad.
What did he sing?
Songs.

Why did he sing?
Ask him, lad.
What kind of songs?
Love.

Then he's alive?
He is, lad.
Where can I find him?
Somewhere.

Perhaps he's searching.
Perhaps, lad.
Looking for her?
Yes.

She isn't dead?
Oh no, lad.
Where is she hid?
He knows.

Isn't it strange, sir?
No, lad.
It isn't strange?
No.

VIGIL

Little priestess:
What do you guard there?
Love.

Little priestess:
Why do you guard love?
I have to.

Little priestess:
From whom? Robbers?
Children.

Not children,
little priestess, not children?
Yes, children.

Little children,
Little priestess, little —?
Big.

Ah, little priestess!

VISTA

The snow,
ah yes, ah yes indeed,
is white and beautiful, white and beautiful,
verily beautiful —
from my window.
The sea,
ah yes, ah yes indeed,
is green and alluring, green and alluring,
verily alluring —
from the shore.
Love,
ah yes, ah yes, ah yes indeed,
verily yes, ah yes indeed!

DUEL

Ragpicker Love, Ragpicker Love:
Begone from that heart over there!

I like its odd little bloodish red rose,
the prettiest ever I saw.

Ragpicker Love, Ragpicker Love:
That rose isn't yours — get away!

I only want it for those I have home;
my repertoire isn't complete.

Ragpicker Love, Ragpicker Love:
What's that that you leave in exchange?

I'm letting fall just a wee bit of joy,
a dimpled white rose — there it goes!

Ragpicker Love, Ragpicker Love:
Come back, that is sorrow you gave!

Sorrow, that queer little creamish white rose,
that thornless, that pure little thing?

Ragpicker Love, Ragpicker Love:
Mine is a rose just like that.

Then how can you judge of such matters as these? —
Good bye, I'm off for home!

SERENADE

Little wild rose in the glass:
Who was it —
Bold and inquisitive sir:
The lady.

Little wild rose in the glass:
When was it —
Bold and inquisitive sir:
At bed time.

Little wild rose in the glass:
God keep you,
Bold and inquisitive sir:
I'm lonely.

Little wild rose in the glass:
I'll bring you —
Little wild rose in the glass:
A comrade.

Bold and inquisitive sir:
Good night then.
Little wild rose in the glass:
Good night.

CREDO

I sing the will to love:
the will that carves the will to live,
the will that saps the will to hurt,
the will that kills the will to die;
the will that made and keeps you warm,
the will that points your eyes ahead,
the will that makes you give, not get,
a give and get that tell us what you are:
how much a god, how much a human.
I call on you to live the will to love.

SCHERZETTO

Stop, queer little dear!

Why is a kiss?
I don't know.
You don't?
No!
Then why do you do it?
Love!
Love?
Yes!
And why is love?
I don't know.
You don't?
No!
And why don't you know?
Because!
Because?
Yes!

Come, queer little dear!

MAN TELLS

Do you love that woman, sir?
Yes, that which I make of her.
Isn't she most beautiful?
Yes, because I think her so.
Hasn't she the best of hearts?
Yes, because I want it so.
Then there might be more like her?
Yes, the one you love.

WOMAN TELLS

I know that you do, but —
when last did you tell me?
I know that you gave, but —
what roses and roses!
I know that you will, but —
such kisses to go!
I know, yes, I know, but —
Begin!

THE WHIP OF THE UNBORN

It is not she who rends me so —
no, it is not she.
These eyes are not hers that hate me so —
no, they are not hers.
Nor this her breath that flaunts me,
nor these her arms that strangle —
no, these are not hers.

It is not I who rends me so —
no, it is not I.
This heart is not mine that goads me on —
no, this is not mine.
Nor these my thoughts that flay me,
nor this my soul that sneers me down —
no, these are not mine.

Nor that her whip that lashes me,
nor that my whip that lashes me —
no, this is not ours.

PRESTISSIMO

I want to hug all the people I love:
I want to hug you, you ugly brown bear;
I want to hug you, you white caterpillar;
I want to hug you, you crocodile;
I've got to hug all of you.
Don't you look at me that way!
Look at me any queer way but that!
If you love me a daisy-full, do!
Only last night, Ted looked at me so:
I was hungry, starving, dying, dead,
surrounded by folk in evening clothes;
no one to hug or think of hugging,
till Ted came in! Could I hold myself?
I flew at him, leaped at him,
climbed his legs, lassoed his neck
and hugged the old shark — but he?
The evening clothes merely glared at me —
but he stared at me; he stared at me.
That is exactly the way of your look,
though I never leaped at you:
You all divine my saccharine will
and palsy my legs, though you love me.
Wait,— some day,
your eyes off guard, drunk, asleep,
or à-tête with the moon —
look out for me; I'm at you!
Some of you are so nice and polite;
such of you call me slender.
Some of you are so nice and frank;

such of you call me skinny.
Slender or skinny, I'll strangle you!
Holy Smoke, my love is a brute!

TO A. H.

Dig your toes right into the soil,
climb, leap up, old Side-kick!
They boast you're down under blood and mud,
our friends back here with me.
But they can't see your muscular leg,
nor the grin in your valiant eye;
nor can they feel what I can feel:
the sun in your valiant heart.
So dig your toes right into the soil,
climb, leap up — if the top you don't see,
to Hell with the top — I believe in you!

TO M. L.

Purple iris in the green bowl:
You ought to be brown.
Flecked with three or four
dizzy yellow midges.
And not quite so stately —
dance a moment, purple iris.
Now
you and the green bowl
are more like her.

TO H. T.

Don't love me! Hate me!
I know I tell you I love you,
but I don't: I love myself.
I love the you in you I need for myself,
the you in you that is eat and drink,
the you in you that can fill my gap,
but my belly-heart full of the food in you,
I'm all right again till the next time, and then?
If you wont supply me,
if you can't supply me,
if all of the me in you has been used,
somebody else will do as well.
Even this scrawl,
this don't love me, hate me,
is sneaking my right hand out to you,
with my left in hiding behind my back.
Love me,
love me when I love you
with a me in me that I've made for you,
but hate me,
hate me till then.
And yet?
Ah for a bit of your love in advance!

CHICOT

Do they knife your heart till it rain black floods?
Love, Chicot, love!

Do they scorn your soul till it freeze and crack?
Laugh, Chicot, laugh!

ON AND IN

There's a wart on my nose and a patch on my pants —
who cares?
'Gainst the itch in my veins from the hymn in my heart —
who dares?

PARASITE

Good woman:
Don't love the man.
Love yourself.
As you have done so exquisitely before.
Like that tortoise-shell cat of yours
washing away the flies; or are they fleas?
You've hurt him again?
Good!
Do it often.
No.
He'll love thee the more.
Always.
Remember how he forgave you the last time.
And how he loved you in the forgiving.
Gave him an adventure in godhood.
And the higher moralities.
Hurt him again.
Fine!

SERVICE

In its way,
it was a beautiful world,
though a thing
he had fashioned as others fashion.
out of blood and wine and milk and soul —
though a thing of themes
like an artless bubble,
and round and smooth, like a bubble,
and delicate, so delicate —
they were his blood and wine and milk and soul.
He offered it to her,
the whole of it,
(because he couldn't offer less)
held it out to her,
asked her to do what she would with it,
asked her to destroy it if she would.
And she did.
She played with it.

SCARECROW

In love with him? Not she.
With love? Nor love. Not she.
Look, see the tarn that she dug,
full of tears,
to the death of the trade that he plied,
full of wares.
Drag the uttermost floor of the pool:
In love with art was she.

Go away, would-be lover, go away!
You are in love with her.
With art? Not art. With love? Nor love.
But her — run away, run away!

TOWARD LOVE

That beauty has begun to fall out of step
is no excuse,
that others have begun their skulking to the rear
is no excuse,
you who are beginning to compromise
or to seek Some Other.
Crucify Nature!

A SWORD

A million-bladed sword,
slashing the petty pates
and sticking the smug stomachs of the past
till the pink blood dribble
and, with a roar of ribald song,
a whirlwind of naked dance,
flaunting the laughing boyish present on a pike
against the stare and whisper of the doddering future —
a sword is love!

THEY

Vivacious Heart:
Art tired, pumping?
Go, rest a while.

Indulgent Soul:
I dare not stop.
They'd censure me.

Vivacious Heart:
They're renegades.
Come, rest a while.

CHAINS

Men, men, who is he drags you along?

Oblivion!

Where do you go, stay, stay!

To the dust cave —
he loves dust, he hoards it,
gathers it in mountains,
blows it into clouds,
blue clouds, green clouds, yellow clouds, gold —
they lift in gray spirals,
they sail in the sun.
But should the rain come —

Should the rain come?

The rain and her silver chains!

The rain and her —

Oh women, women, women, fly along!

ROMANCE

That red-headed woodpecker, tapping my ear,
(Come out and see there!
What?
Over there!
Where?
Over there!
Yes, in the air.)
is seven songs fair
the peer of you all.
Beware?
I don't care —
I love him, the dear!

CONVENTION

Beware of a pirate who will scuttle your ship,
a cross-eyed toothless pirate!

I'll blow my great horn, carved of dead men's skulls,
right down your ear and freeze you.

I'll stick my big thumb into your eye
and my knife clean through your throat.

I'll pull out my goblet and drink your blood
while my foot rests on your belly.

I'll laugh a loud laugh that'll shunt your soul to hell
and spit on your face for an epitaph.

I'll kick your carcass to its coffin, the sea,
a sea that wont sing even a dirge for you.

Then I'll yank down the flag that you hoisted up so high
and raise the devil's own instead. . . .

Beware of a pirate who will scuttle your ship,
a cross-eyed toothless pirate!

I crawl aboard when your sails begin to fail —
the sails that are blown by the strength of your will.

LEOPARDS

Look at that nigger there!
The big shiny cat-muscled leopard!
It's great to be living, man.

Eh?
You wont?

Look at that nigger, man!
You filthy prig —
his mother
was as clean as yours —
slut or no slut.
Look at him, man!

Eh?
God blind you, man!
Turn your eyes out, not in!
There's a world out there —
not a jungle.
Look, man!

THE TREE

I am four monkeys.
One hangs from a limb,
tail-wise,
chattering at the earth;
another is cramming his belly with cocoanut;
the third is up in the top branches,
quizzing the sky;
and the fourth —
he's chasing another monkey.
How many monkeys are you?

UNDER GLASS

If I could catch that moth,
that fluttering, wayward thing
that beats about inside me all the day and half the night,
(an insignificant net could certainly do it)
I'd stick him through the head
with a pin that's long and thin,
a pin that's long and strong enough to mount him under glass;
(an insignificant pin could certainly do it)
I'd learn of him once for all,
the color of his wings,
the nature of those crazy things that fooled me all these years:
purple, red or blue,
yellow, white or black,
or whether they're one and all of these and a shade or two besides;
(an insignificant harmony or dissonance they could be)
I'd learn them once for all,
I'd know them, every vein,
so clear to all my neighbors, so invisible — to me.

YEARNING

Funny solemn little old gray owl,
perched beside me in this dreary cage:
if you and I could see,
we could see the sun,
a bright yellow nut, so they say.

We can see the moon, you say,
but he's so gloomy, funny owl;
the dark, you say,
but he's so black.
We can see the stars, you say,
but they're so weary, funny owl;
the birds, you say,
but they're so sad.
The sun that we smell every day, funny owl,
a bright yellow nut, as they say —
if we could only see, we might snatch him.

Do not nudge me, funny solemn little old gray owl,
don't be angry, I but ponder here beside you.
The moon, yes, the dark,
yes, the stars in our cage,
we ourselves, are real, are great.
But if you and I could see,
we might eat the sun,
a bright yellow nut, so they say.

TO A MALTESE

Tell me, little cat, stop and tell me, little cat:
Wherefore is life, think you?

You're poking that paper ball, little cat:
You're poking that paper ball.

Tell me, little cat, stop and tell me, little cat:
Wherefore is life, think you?

You're lapping away your milk, little cat:
You're lapping away your milk.

Tell me, little cat, stop and tell me, little cat:
Wherefore is life, think you?

You're washing your soft gray coat, little cat:
You're washing your soft gray coat.

Tell me, little cat, stop and tell me, little cat:
Wherefore is life, think you?

You're purring and falling asleep, little cat:
You're purring and falling asleep . . .

LIFE

I met four guinea hens to-day,
creaking like pulleys.

"A crrk," said one,
"a crrk," said two,
"a crrk," said three,
"a crrk," said four.

I agree with you, cheerfully, ladies.

TO A CANARY

Piano, pianissimo, gay yellow bird, not so loud, I beg of you!
We're trying to make a bit of a song, I and my old bassoon.
We know our toodling is dreadfully vague, as vague as our innermost selves.
But we didn't learn in a school, dear bird, the woods, not a cage, bore us.

Piano, pianissimo, gay yellow bird, not so loud, I beg of you!
A moment ago, how happy we were; we'd almost made our tune.
You with your purling, chirping and trills, stopped it, silenced it short.
You with your noise that you fling at us — we who revere your art.

Piano, pianissimo, gay yellow bird, not so loud, I beg of you!
Cannot you hear that we are done, humbled, I and bassoon?
Is songing a killing of amateurs? that is not big, but vain.
And we sang to nobody but ourselves; the world we left to you.

ANTS

Who made the world, sir?
I don't know, son —
See the ants on that hill, with a fly.

Who made the world, sir?
Some say that God —
The fly is dead, son.
They're dragging him to their hole.

Who made God, sir?
I don't know —
Now he's gone, son.
The ants are an indefatigable race.

Who made God, sir?
Observe how they swarm all over the hill.
They're hunting another fly.

They're funny, sir.
They are.

THEOLOGY

The night is a circus tent.
The stars are peep holes
the bad ones have made
to spy on us.
Why aren't the gods like us?
Why don't they pay
and come in the way we did?
Are they poor?
Are they cheats?
Maybe they fear we'd make clowns of them?
Suppose we did;
aren't clowns the gods of our circus?
What's the matter with those fellows?
Tell them to climb down
and come in free.
We don't want them staring in on us.
It annoys the performers.

PROGRESS

Quoth a god:
See them move,
slowly, serenely, onward,
through mountains and all,
stretching and dragging
their long steel bodies,
their slimy bodies,
rib by rib,
across continents,
and leaving their spawn,
cities,
behind them.
Egregious worms!

IN A DREAM

Oh what delirious fun this is,
this juggling of crazy balloons!
Up with the crimson one;
down comes the blue;
up with the copper one;
down comes the gold;
up with the cinnamon —
up with them, each of them, all of them here:
the evening star and Venus and Mars,
the morning star and the whole milky way!
I am tossing and catching them, catching and tossing them,
hundreds of worlds at one time.
Toss and catch, catch and toss, toss and catch, catch and toss,
more than a child am I!
Oh what delirious fun this is!
Up with Minerva and down with the moon;
up with old Saturn and down with the sky;
up with the blistering jolly hot sun —
Who ever played with balloons and balloons,
such hundreds of worlds at one time?
Big strong Atlas — he had but one,
the one he was doomed to carry,
while I toss and catch, catch and toss, toss and catch, catch and toss,
all at one time — Great Jove, great Zeus, great Jupiter save us —
I almost dropped that little brown ball,

that little brown ball, the earth!
Had I dropped that ball, that little brown ball,
that little brown ball, the earth?

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

It's absurd, I know,
to be so happy.
Still worse, I know,
to be a fool:
And worst, I know,
to have no reason:
To be so happy,
without a sou.

Come search my pockets,
and you can't find one.
Still worse, my home;
you'll find me poor.
And worst, my credit:
you'll find me pauper.
To be so happy,
without a sou?

Tobacco's gone,
but I am happy.
The next meal, where?
I'm happier still:
absurd, I know:
(but what can you do?)
that I'm so happy,
without a sou.

PENNIES

John is a vender of trinkets —
with a wife, little Jim and Joe.

Ann is an Irish seamstress —
Mary and Christ gladden her.

He sold — she bought a crucifix,
with the image in gold, all in gold.

She gave — he took fifteen pennies —
little Jim and Joe are wild.

For fifteen pennies, there'll be chicken to-night.
For fifteen pennies, she can pray.

TODAY

Dance, garret, dance your maddest!
Come down, ceiling, dance with the floor!
Walls, a minuet chaste, the four of you!
Pictures, go you, jig it gay!
Chairs, dip, tango it, I wont see you!
You two doors, do a hoochi koochi!
As for me, Boys, loon I'll be
and kick a hole right through the sky!

Done! Now all of us dance a ring around
Ma Familias, Old Mother Dream,
who each day sends up four meals to us
through our uncle, Careless Care!
Done! Now all of us sing the food she brought,
she, herself, climbing all those stairs:
Today, this day, this very-very day,
she sold this very-very poem!

EVERY MORNING

Our halls are very dark.
But not so dark we cannot see,
every morning,
a bent old figure,
kneeling,
on the steps or in the halls,
scrubbing —
what you call a janitress.
Good morning, she says.
Good morning, say we.
Our halls are very dark.
But not so dark —

NOCTURNE

The pantaloons are dancing,
dancing through the night,
pure white pantaloons,
underneath the moon,
on a jolly wash line,
skipping from my room,
over to Miranda,
who washed them this noon.

MOOD

How beautiful the smooth black limbs of Night!
How dangerous their stealthy undulation!
Not so the sated limbs of bourgeois Day!

And her invitation:
Come with me.
I know a place far off.
Be free.
Your wife and public tongues —
pay them your conscience;
I ask no pay.
Others have lain with me?
Yes, aristocrats.

How beautiful . . .
Dangerous. .
Wait, Night, I follow, I follow thee!

PRISONERS

Girl, girl,
running so fast:
Please don't imprison them so.
They're drunk with blood
like the rest of you,
they love to laugh
like your eyes and hair,
they're crazy to romp
like your legs and arms —
girl, down with your hands!

This is a moral town?
What do you care?

GROTESQUE

Lady, fat lady,
weeping such tears:
You need a quilt
not a kerchief.
Were you the shadow,
the bulk of a flea,
my grasshopper knees —

Dear stout lady:
Why are you large and I small?

TO CIRCE

Voice, voice, marvelous voice:
come, come back to me!
Pelt me with fresher wild roses;
caress me with still bluer anemones;
bruise me with thornier thistles;
embrace, imprison, smother me
with the merriest of buttercups and daisies!
Circe, come,
come back for one superlative moment,
and I will be all your swine in one,
your lowest groveller, your funniest of mirelings!
Nor need you pelt me, caress or bruise;
only come,
come back ere I run mad
inside this miserable, yearning, incomprehensible, beauty-worshipping I of mine!

CORTÉGE

Dear gray-eyed Sorrow:
Be comforted.
Smile.
All of us love you.
We love you with a human love.
There are no gods,
no thunderers,
no hurlers of joy
among us. It is we
who walk with you.

Whisper him
you have led so gently,
so far along,
who used to smile —
didn't he?
We love him too.

Dear gentle Lady:
You are weary.
Your step is slow, so slow.
Lift your head.
Listen.
Don't you hear the thrumming of trees?
Look — do you see rivers dancing?
Tell him.

BACH

Let us pile stones
to silence in solitude
high enough
and of such art
to see and not be seen.
Trees
let there be none,
nor water or sand.
Since it must be
let there come
that which calls him back,
the tragi-comic wind. . . .
Have the place watched.
Not all —
some of the stars
might do.
But none of the moons.

Nay —
let's have them all
with the night as it consummates dawn!
Then we wont have to hide!

SCHUBERT

And over there
sat a beautiful child,
a child with a beautiful face,
a child with beautiful hands;
but its body was deformed,
its eyes were deeply melancholy.
It smiled from time to time:
its mouth smiled,
but its eyes remained melancholy;
its cheeks smiled,
but its eyes remained melancholy;
its brows smiled,
but its eyes remained melancholy;
mouth, cheeks, brows,
its whole face smiled —
but its eyes remained unchanged.

In the next room,
they were playing Schubert.

CÉZANNE

Our door was shut to the noon-day heat.
We could not see him.
We might not have heard him either —
resting, dozing, dreaming pleasantly.
But his step was tremendous —
are mountains on the march?

He was no man who passed.
But a great faithful horse
dragging a load
up the hill.

MISTRESS ART

Her roving witches' eyes had sighted him at work.
And the glance that lighted them so suddenly
betrayed the desire of her heart,
a desire which quickly found its way to her tongue:

"Ah, Child! Come to me! Serve me! Listen:
I crave a golden blue bowl."

He made her a golden blue bowl.

"'Tis passing fair," she said, "but I am weary of it now.
I crave a song of love."

He made her a song of love.

"'Tis passing fair," she said, "but I am weary of that too.
I crave a sculptured mermaid."

And he made her a sculptured mermaid.

"'Tis passing fair," she said, "but I am weary of that as well.
I crave an orange-tinted butterfly."

Instead of an orange-tinted butterfly,
he complained:

"Stay, Mistress, I can no more.
Stay, Mistress, I grow tired.
Ah stay, stay, Mistress, I grow sick, I fall, I die —"

But she did not hear.
Her roving witches' eyes had sighted another at work.
And immediately she was heard to call:

"Ah, Child! Come to me! Serve me! Listen:
I crave —"

CULTURE

There is only one.
Only one sun.
Only one moon.
And you too.
Be that.

CHILDREN

They live; we exist.
They feel; we think.
They come; we go.

They play; we fumble.
They dream, awake; we dream, asleep.
They sleep; we toss.

We cannot be.
But let us try.

PRODIGY

Sighed a child:
Down there,
I see such millions of them,
each one so dignified,
each one a man.
Don't they ever play?

BROOM

Tiny boy,
staring at me
with eyes like toy balloons:
That broom is much bigger than you.
Put it down.
You wont?
Then don't put it down.

KIDS

A wee white girl,
dancing,
to a hurdy gurdy,
with a wee black girl,
and both laughing.

PREJUDICE

Little mouse:
Are you
some rat's little child?
I wont love you if you are.

NEPHEWS AND NIECES

CHARLES:

So soon you've tired of that toy?
Who can blame you — with more to come,
throw it away, you're wise!
But hark to this from one who knows:
that when you grow a great big man,
they'll preach you life's a serious thing —
to throw away your last toy too —
but don't you heed them, hark to me:
Save it — you will need one then!

EVELYN:

School, you say, is the place to go,
and the bigger your books, the more you learn,
and the more you learn, the smarter you grow,
and the smarter you grow, the better you are?
I'd like to be smarter and better, myself,
but all the books in this old world
can't teach me even my A B C —
after a glimpse of your two small eyes.

CLARA:

Ah to be your baby doll,
to have you braid my yellow curls,
to have you pat my ruddy cheeks,
to have you rub my drowsy eyes,
to have you croon my tired ears,
to have you lay me in that crib,
to have you kiss my mouth "good night"!
To be your doll so long, little girl,
I'd give the whole of my thirty years.

THE TWINS:

How dare you rascals look the same?
Don't tell me you were born that way!
You're in league with evil angels
to steal all cookies here below;
then you call each other, thief!
I'll let you free — wont snitch on you —
but you must whisper, just to me:
Can I find a twin somewhere?

BABY HOWARD:

Hey, crooked animal, crawling there:
What do you call that bug you found?
"Boo"?—what a wonderful name!
And what do you call those fuzzy chicks?
"Boo" again?—what a wonderful name!
And what do you call that jolly red ball?
"Boo" again?—what a wonderful name!
Gee, that everything were "boo" to me!

RAYMOND (A FEW DAYS OLD):

You too?
I didn't see you at first.
When did you come?
And why?
Just to blink your eyes a few times?
I hope you'll stay a while
and enjoy yourself.
We need noisy chaps like you.

LITTLE FOLK

Of late,
I've been craving a child,
the adoption of a child.
Not a child of mine —
I have no blood for that,
and that requires two —
but an ordinary child,
like myself,
who will be serious with me,
playfully,
and play with me,
seriously —
I have quarts of blood for that.
Little One:
Will you adopt me?

BALLY-BOO

Bad Boy This, Bad Boy That:
If you don't lie still on Mother's lap,
Big Green Frog will come for you
with his bally-bally-boo, bally-boo.
His big bass voice will freeze you through:
Bally-bally-boo, bally-boo.

Good Boy This, Good Boy That:
Now you're still on Mother's lap,
Little White Dove will come for you
with his bally-bally-boo, bally-boo.
His little soft voice will warm you through:
Bally-bally-boo, bally-boo.

Best Boy This, Best Boy That:
You he'll take from Mother's lap,
Faraway Moonbeam, come for you,
with his bally-bally-boo, bally-boo.
His faraway voice will sleep you through:
Bally-bally-boo, bally-boo.

LAMENT

Sad World:
I wish you were small
that I might lift you to my lap
and sing you to the rest
that you have never rested.
Some sleepy soft thing
that wakeful mothers sing
would do it.
I have such a song in me
Dear World:
I wish you were small.

OLD MANUSCRIPT

The sky
is that beautiful old parchment
in which the sun
and the moon
keep their diary.
To read it all,
one must be a linguist
more learned than Father Wisdom;
and a visionary
more clairvoyant than Mother Dream.
But to feel it,
one must be an apostle:
one who is more than intimate
in having been, always,
the only confidant —
like the earth
or the sea.

EARTH WISDOM

Said the earth:
I love you, flower.
Go up and see the sun.
And feel the rain — it's soft.
Winds will play with you,
merry winds.
But see that great blue —
I like that round blue —
I want that high blue —

Said the earth:
I love you, flower.
It is late.
Come back to me.
I don't want to —
I wont —
I want the moon —
I want —

You've been playing too long, flower.
That isn't good for you.
Nor fair to the morrow.
Come,
said the earth.

WHAT DECEMBER TOLD JANUARY

Don't you believe in snow flakes?
I do.
They find their way down here —
they are sent
by the black clouds
to remind us
that their first cousins,
the moths,
have merely gone on a vacation
to their mothers',
the white clouds.
(Folks must rest, even from play.)
That is to say,
black clouds and white clouds
are brother and sister,
snow flakes
and moths, spring and love —
Spring and love?
My dear sir, you surely believe in them?
Do!

SPRINGTIME

Willow: Why do you bend so low
with your staring into the stream?
Only to see how deep it is!

Fool: Do you think you're beardless still
and meditating suicide?
Only to find if one might wade!

Lilies and cat-tails belong to the young,
and the water is cold this time of year.
Only to touch my love over there!

Your love? you love? and which is she?
that wrinkled, gnarled, old bandy-leg?
The one with the gay white limbs!

Dotard: What could she see in you?
She'd yank your beard and laugh away.
She's nodding her head at me!

DOGWOOD

His feet are run mad with anemones?
His hair streaked white over night?

He's tearing soft clouds
from the sky
again —
dear old funny wood at his age!

IDEALISTS

Brother Tree:
Why do you reach and reach?
do you dream some day to touch the sky?
Brother Stream:
Why do you run and run?
do you dream some day to fill the sea?
Brother Bird:
Why do you sing and sing?
do you dream —

Young Man:
Why do you talk and talk and talk?

DAISIES

Daisy dear:
Look you as far as you can:
Is this a white world we live in?
No sir, it has its yellow as well.

But daisy:
The next field, the next and beyond?
They have their yellow as well.

But daisy:
It should be, will be a white world we live in?
It isn't a matter of should, sir, or will:
Nor would I have should if I could.

CLOUDS

The sun
leaned out,
a moment ago,
to steal a peep at the earth,
and finding that he hadn't gone away,
pulled in her head again.
The earth,
in fact,
hadn't thought of it,
never schemes,
wouldn't dream of going away.

The sex
of this drama,
since sex it must be —
well, look at her now,
come spying again,
with an eye much larger
and fierce to behold!
Can you flout me for deeming her, she?

RAIN

The leaves are happy again.
So are the robins.
Me too.
It rained just now.
What's wrong with you?
You worm.
Grin!

A CLEAR DAY

Sky:
Nowhere in you is affectation.

Is it that you alone are blue?
Is it that you alone are high?

Sky:
Take me to you!

PONG

Between two bricks
that play pedestal
to a box of geraniums
he makes his home —
three inches wide, six deep and two high.
By day,
he sits there
solemnly,
alone,
watching the world that passes
and chewing his cud
like any sage.
At night,
he adds his song
to that of lovers —
a single buoyant note,
a single pong.
He is old
and young,
that frog.

SUNDAY

There came along
down the lane
waddling genially,
nodding amiably,
like a girl
on her way to Sunday school
with her prayer book,
(save
that he led a small cart
quite as inoffensive as himself
laden with corn and potatoes and cauliflower
and cheerful beets)
his rhomboid head
mounted by a pyramidal straw hat —
there came
an old thin horse,
alone
and so absent-minded,
he did not return my bow,
but waddled on,
veered off into another lane
and disappeared.

GIVE TO ME

Every drop in the eternal seas,
every star in the eternal skies,
every seed in the eternal earth,
passionately, this is its cry:
Give to me, Life, give to me!

To every drop in the eternal seas,
to every star in the eternal skies,
to every seed in the eternal earth,
dispassionately, this is Life's cool reply:
Give to me life; life give to me.

For every drop in the eternal seas,
for every star in the eternal skies,
for every seed in the eternal earth,
compassionately, Death requests of his wife:
Give to me, Life, give to me.

IMPROVISATION

Wind:
Why do you play
that long beautiful adagio,
that archaic air,
to-night?
Will it never end?
Or is it the beginning,
some prelude you seek?

Is it a tale you strum?
Yesterday, yesterday —
Have you no more for us?

Wind:
Play on.
There is nor hope
nor mutiny
in you.

CHEESE

Rats overrun his cellar.
He salts their cheese with poison.
The excellent cannibals eat each other.
The eaters die with the eaten.
Some such pleasant fodder
(he claims it brings on asthma)
ought to be carelessly strewn about —
for these hungry inventors of war.

MOTHER TO MOTHER

Mary Mother:
Unborn children —
who will keep them,
wake them, sleep them,
find them play room?

Baby Mother:
I will keep them,
sleep them, wake them —
in my heart, play
unborn children.

OVERHEARD IN AN ASYLUM

And here we have another case,
quite different from the last,
another case quite different —
Listen.

Baby, drink.
The war is over.
Mother's breasts
are round with milk.

Baby, rest.
The war is over.
Only pigs
slop over so.

Baby, sleep.
The war is over.
Daddy's come
with a German coin.

Baby, dream.
The war is over.
You'll be a soldier
too.

We gave her the doll —
Now there we have another case,
quite different from —

THE LAPIDARY

Said Lord War to Lady Life:
Your eyes would make beautiful stones —
stones more beautiful than your eyes.
I like them.
Just bend your neck three inches nearer.
One little blow will cut it.
You wont feel the rest.
As for the future Lady Life —
she will wear them and profit thereby.

AMERICA

Up and down he goes
with terrible, reckless strides,
flaunting great lamps
with joyous swings —
one to the East
and one to the West —
and flaunting two words
in a thunderous call
that thrills the hearts of all enemies:
All, One; All, One; All, One; All, One!
Beware that queer, wild, wonderful boy
and his playground; don't go near!
All, One; All, One; All, One; All, One:
Up and down he goes.

THULE

This is no new battle —
immense though it be.
This is the battle of always —
common to men as in things.
And that land,
that beautiful place,
receding, receding so far away;
that is no new land —
dream though it be.
That is the land of never.

ETCHING

There were seven in all,
clothed in black,
seven silent crows,
standing,
not quite vertical,
around an ebony box;
and in the box,
an eighth,
lying quite horizontal.

A TALE

Is it every other year that narcissi bloom?
I don't know — anyhow:
She wanted narcissi to bloom for her.
She planted some bulbs in her garden.
The first year, no,
the second year, no,
and the third year, no,
none came.
But the fourth year —
well, she was stricken with a fever,
a dainty silly fever,
and away she went,
yellow-eyed, white and thin,
to a drug house many many miles away.
Narcissi came?
Oh yes, just one.
And it died, and she too?
Of course!

RESIGNATION

Death, thou silent partner of Life:
Translate thyself.
Thou who art ever near unto Life,
seeing and unseen:
What is thy purpose?
Is it but taking Life by the hand to guide him to the grave,
or is it to lead him beyond?
Translate thy purpose, or tell me of this grave.
Is it an infinite sleep,
a soft, painless quieting of Life's life,
or is it an awakening,
a kindly, loving executer of his dream?
Thou art silent?
It is well.
I trust thee even so.

VEILS

Habit makes it grow easy and easier.
This peeling of veils from my heart.
One of these days I'll have the brute naked.
I, for one, want to see him.

TO MY MOTHER

PRAYER

Existence, the place where one does one's bleeding,
Life, its Golgotha,
Love, its crucifix,
Self, the mob that does the scorning,
and Nature, the god who goads them on.
Mother mine:
Help me to love.

DECORATION

I have only thoughts for you.
And you never wanted anything.

APRIL

April is here again.
The flowers are back.
Did you send them —
these violets?
I'm sure you sent some of them —
one or two?

FLOWERS

Flowers never decked her table.
To be sure,
there are other matters.
As she proved.
Unconsciously.

THREE MOMENTS

Mother mine:
Did I ever tell you:
(I wonder
can you recall)
I love you?
It would be fine
could I see you again —
you come back to me,
I go out to you —
for three moments.
I don't think I ever told you,
and I know I rarely —
Just for three moments,
Mother mine.

DANCE

I went to a dance last night.
And it occurred to me,
somehow,
that you and Father used to dance —
though I never saw you.
Folk speak of it,
gently,
with tender admiration.
It must have been fun dancing with you.
Though you were small.

I'm growing younger these days.
After a fashion.
I'll be a dancer some day.
May I have the next dance?
That old Strauss waltz
the wind is playing for you?
You used to love me, too —
will you?

GLANCES

Dear pure gray eyes:
Your glance follows me
through my worst darknesses,
saves me from my worst selves,
almost.
It isn't your fault.
I ought to be the best of mortals.

GIVING

From the very beginning,
you gave me
bodily nourishment
and spiritual.

You give me —

LULLABIES

If I could sing as you sang,
if I could love as you,
I'd croon you to sleep,
I'd hum you to rest,
as you did me
at night.

And nights are long
out there.
And voices strange
and shrill.
I'd croon you to sleep,
I'd hum you to rest,
if I could love as you.

AFTERTHOUGHT

Christ:
What do you think of her?

VARIATIONS

WANDERLIED

I who wandered
used to wonder
why they call it,
Silvermine.

I who wandered
found a secret
lump of gold, a
goldmine!

Now I wonder
folk so prudent
dared to call it,
Silvermine:

I who wonder
how a wanderer
learned to sigh, ah
ladymine!

DANCE

Moon dance,
you were not to blame.

Nor you,
lovely white moth.

But I saw you together.

WIZARDRY

Your hands,
so strong,
so cool,
wizards
improvising sleep
. . .

CARESS

It was as though one of those trees —
the tallest of them,
that compassionate one —
had bent over me for a moment.

VARIATION

Till you came —
I was I.

WANT

Am I a beggar?
It isn't my fault.
I was so rich,
without care, without want —

MARCH

The air is drenched with the noise of wind.
I with the noise of you.

SUN

Your hair is full of sun.
And you.
Your hair is full of sun.
Me too!

WILLOWS

This amphitheater of willows
praying that tarn
are my mes
in constant attendance
on you.

IN THE DARK

Lunatic:
Stop beating those bars.
I want to get out —
But you keep us awake.
I want to get out to her.

VISIT

Blow sixteen blasts on your piccolo, Satan;
shoot Hell up here.
And you, God, drop me a load of clouds,
the sun and moon?
A truce, equality this once, I pray;
let earth be king.
Our good, green, brown, our sad old earth —
she, Heaven, is coming down!

NIGHTS

There are such things as nights, I know.
That nights can breed a spawn called doubt.
I know that you are in terror of them.
That you no longer lie with them.
That you have had such offspring.

Go, lie with them, lie with them always.
And think of me.
I never doubt you.
I lie with nights and think of you.
Our thoughts breed faith.

CONSULTATION

I will consult the sea about it:
my big brave sea.
He is a serene old fellow.
I will carry him this tumult of mine:
this will to kill, this will to die.
And he,—
down there at the bottom of me —
he will smile.

MANNA

You can't disappoint,
hurt anybody —
not even a straw.
Isn't that why
you said, yes?

JEALOUSY

Your mouth
pressed to my ear
is some shell
betraying secrets of the deep.

Mine to yours —
but nobody cares what mine tells you,
so why tell them?

SHADOW

The never-old old,
the ever-new new:
the sky in you,
the earth in me.

And the ever-never!

VISION

They cannot know your beauty, dear.
Its heights, depths, levels.
They haven't seen you,
your face abloom,
in some solitude —
like our rendezvous wood
where mushrooms grow.

TWO

The child in you
loves me.
I dream
a world of us
which cannot be
till you
love me.

CONTRA MUNDUM

There is one sanctuary
that is never shut —
to you.

PER CONTRA

Don't weep.
There is sanctuary
from me,
as well.
Come.

PRIEST

I burn candles,
candles —
and no two alike —
at an altar.

HEAVEN

We didn't make Heaven.
I want
the one small life
we have made.

VARIATIONS

Even you
are variations,
variations
never the same:
hair and eyes and
moods and smiles and
curves and kisses —
girl, mother, woman, child —
each and all so
never the same.

So many to keep!
So many to come!

DEVILS

So you have a real bad devil?
My, that's bully:
so have I!
Come, let's shut them up together:
there to live
till they love.
Then let's let them out, the darlings:
you grab mine,
I grab yours.
And go make them hug the others:
all those devils,
our good angels.
The more the love,
the more the life —
Will you?

SELF-INDULGENCE

Most of my kindness to you
is kindness to me.
Do you mind?

DESIRE

Even
my desire
of you
is a desire
to annihilate
the last squirm
of me.

UNIVERSE

There is an abysmal whirlpool,
a universe of blood —
always.
Your mouth grips mine,
and a celestial calm,
a universe of you —
instead.

WHITE CURTAINS

On occasion
when my heart is cool
it lives,
like the gentle white curtains of my room,
the yellow of the sun,
the green of the walls,
you —
everything
that isn't me.

APPROBATION

Nature
strokes my hair
and smiles.

ENTITY

I am.
And you.
And atoms.
Censure?
Forgiveness?
Why?

BIRTHDAY

You were born.
Funny, isn't it?
So was I.

Billions of lives between.
Before and after.
To come.

You gave me you.
Funny, isn't it?
I gave you me.

But some say that God
gave me you —
Did He give you me?

Well,
if I have giving to do —
Perhaps there's some corner He overlooked?
I hope so.

Funny, isn't it?

BETROTHAL

Thank you, sirs.
But this is our funeral.
We made it.
So take your flowers elsewhere.

SOLITUDE

Always,
always,
I craved solitude.
It came with you.

GENERATION

May a new love,
raised
from my more of you
and my less of me,
unfold.

EPIGRAM

Isn't it
that we like each other
quite a little more
than we dislike each other
that we love each other?

NEARNESS

Farther away.
Being so near.

Strangers.
Even now.

Music gone.
Music here.
But so much unheard.

Farther away.
Being so near.

Beauty.
The one serenity.
This.

STILLNESS

There she lies.
Asleep.

All-the-world watches.
Mute.

IMAGE

The pale wild geranium
on its crucifix leaves
would do.

ADAM AND EVE

What shall be thought
in after days,
wept of us,
laughed of us?
Do children care?

Perhaps
when they grow
to warfare
like ours —
they may think
something.

OTHERS

And
there were so many more.
They could not
find their way.
I could not
keep them.
And
there are.

PORTRAIT

Say,
do,
what you will,
what you cannot help,
and though
for the surprise of a moment
it seems to her
as you say or do —
after that in her
which is herself
has heard,
as soon as that
has begun its gentle revolutions,
its quaint defence of you,
the cheery labor of which she is unaware,
(don't you see it in her eyes?)
you,
like me and all the others,
are good:
you cannot be otherwise —
(does she shake her head at you?)
she deems you innocent,
(does she laugh a little, roguishly?)
laughs
to your wicked corner,
wishes
hers might be like yours
that she might be like you!

Don't question it —
praise her for it —

wonder whence it came.
Don't scare her with homage —
be glad!
And if you are ashamed,
if you are the fool who feels shame,
begone,
rush it away,
down into yourself,
anywhere —
don't let her see!

MISTERMAN KREYMBORG

MISTERMAN KREYMBORG

My father's name was Kreymborg —
Herrmann Kreymborg.
It isn't a pretty name.
It isn't a name one remembers.
How can you —
you've never heard it, read it before?
Seeing it now,
you'll call it unpronounceable,
German, Norwegian, Danish, Dutch,
or something — and let it go,
never find it in your memory . . .
It is so with us.
With most of us.

My father was a shopkeeper.
In the days of Indians,
he'd push a gaudily painted Indian on rollers
out in front of a morning
and roll it back of a night.
It was a tobacco shop.
That was his life.

Herrmann Kreymborg had five children.
(We'll only concern ourselves
with the fifth of the five just now.)
Being a man of some slight imagination,
along with the rest of him,
Kreymborg,
in approaching this fifth of the five,
said to his wife:

"Family names wont do.
We've tried them before.
Not without success.
But for this one
we must use something else."

He searched the telephone book,
a business directory,
advertisements in the newspapers,
signs over shops and on shop windows,
and finally, a dictionary of names.
He came upon Alfred.
He liked it,
pretty or no.
But he wasn't satisfied.
He craved some outside assurance.
Such was one twist of his nature,
he couldn't get away from pedigrees.
Alfred must have a pedigree.
Not necessarily a Kreymborg pedigree.
But somebody's pedigree.

In his stumbling stuttering way,
Herrmann Kreymborg
came upon King Alfred,
the Alfred who let the loaves burn,
but the Alfred who was a king—
of homespun.
So Herrmann Kreymborg
whispered his wife:
"We will call it, Alfred."
And Alfred it was called. . . .

Alfred Kreymborg has reached thirty-two.
Somehow.
And somehow,
by some miracle, let us say,
a few of you —
notably
Lance Hartpence,
Billy Williams,
Skip Cannéll,
Bogie Bodenheim,
Carl Sandburg —
know
Alfred Kreymborg.

Kreymborg is glad. . . .
Glad
that in knowing Alfred Kreymborg
you shall hear of Herrmann Kreymborg,
glad
that with his sinews,
feeble or no,
he has
or may
or will
make you recall
the sinews
of Herrmann Kreymborg —
the offspring give birth to the father.

Edgar Lee Masters,
poet of the dead:
I commend your notice,

I challenge you
to see the living
Misterman Kreymborg,
(who lies, I think,
such as there is of him,
in Woodlawn Cemetery)
through Alfred Kreymborg,
who soaks this
over,
around
and under
him.

March 12, 1916.

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